

“No Rate Increase Forum”

Wednesday, February 15 2017



To: Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal of NSW

Subject: Submission regarding Special Rate Variation increase to rates in the Shoalhaven Local Government Area

Dear Local Government Team,

Shoalhaven City Council has submitted a proposal for a Special Rate Variation increase over and above the annual rate peg.

We say, along with the majority of the broader community that this increase is unnecessary and unaffordable to the point of financial hardship to rate-payers and in point of fact, with much better management of income, funds, new projects expenditures and much needed maintenance Shoalhaven City Council could easily achieve their goals, while meeting resident's expectations of their duty to them.

We submit our and the community's full objection to you in order that you reject the submission Council has presented to you as of Monday, February 13 2017.

We and the entire Shoalhaven community have had 5 public meetings with officers of the Council, while as a body the “No Rate Increase Forum” has had direct one-on-one meetings with Council, represented by 3 councilors and the Acting Chief Financial Officer.

The public meetings were hosted by the 5 dissenting Councilors, with other (pro-increase) Councilors and the Mayor in attendance.

As it stands 5 of the 8 pro-increase councilors specifically ran on a no-increase platform at the recent Local Government elections in September 2016 and yet voted for the increase outlined in the proposal once elected.

At the meeting of Shoalhaven City Council held in Nowra on Wednesday, February 1 2017, the Council Chamber's were full to overflowing with residents displaying their objections to the Special Rate Variation increase when the Council voted 8 votes to 5 to proceed.

Further, we the "No Rate Increase Forum" and the community members that we represent state categorically that Council has yet to meet IPART Criterion 2 for a proposed rate increase to be allowed to go ahead.

The Shoalhaven community has not yet seen a mail-out to all ratepayers with a reply-paid survey included.

The Shoalhaven community is still awaiting Resident Workshops, a random survey of rate-payers (that has been appropriately stratified to meet the demographic characteristics of the Local Government Area), nor have we seen public meetings hosted by Council itself (nor by the 8 pro-increase councilors) to explain, discuss and/or negotiate any Special Rate Variation with the Shoalhaven rate-paying community.

The "No Rate Increase Forum" along with the Shoalhaven community further says – Shoalhaven City Council is obviously well-funded with present income including the pre-existing annual rate peg.

As we write Shoalhaven City Council is to provide \$850, 000 funding for an upgrade to an existing play-area at Mollymook Beach – that we understand does not breach Work, Health and Safety policies and is otherwise a completely safe area, while also funding a \$1 million croquet field at Bawley Point.

Shoalhaven City Council is also in the planning stages of a \$60 million sporting complex, while at the same time the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre (also administered by Shoalhaven City Council) continues to run at an annual reported loss of \$1.4 million, all this at the expense of much-needed maintenance across the City.

The Shoalhaven community has already put a comprehensive solution to Councilors to resolve this issue, to sell the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre to make up this maintenance short-fall.

Preferably, it is Councilors better managing rate-payers money and other Council income that will ensure that the Shoalhaven will be "Fit For The Future" for decades to come.

It was also pointed out at the Huskisson Forum (with the Mayor and 8 councilors present) by the Corporate Manager of a manufacturing firm in the region (himself a new resident in the area), who having examined Shoalhaven City Council's Financial Statements noted that any short-falls as deemed, could be found in the Council's own figures.

In Summary –

The Shoalhaven community is against this increase as both unnecessary and as liable to cause immense financial hardship, as well as not related to specific infrastructure or maintenance projects over and above a better-managed funds pool from the fixed rate peg, and looks to IPART to find for the Shoalhaven community and decline the Special Rate Variation submission by Shoalhaven City Council.

Sincerely,

Mike McNally (Chairman) - The "No Rate Increase Forum", on behalf of the Shoalhaven community.

Committee:

Michael McNally (Chairman)

